

Towns of Lanoka Harbor and Murray Grove  
New Jersey Coastal Heritage Trail  
U.S. Highway 9, South bank of Cedar Creek  
Lanoka Harbor  
Ocean County  
New Jersey

HABS No. NJ-1022

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WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

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## HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

### TOWNS OF LANOKA HARBOR AND MURRAY GROVE

HABS No. NJ-1022

Location: New Jersey Coastal Heritage Trail, U.S. Highway 9, South bank of Cedar Creek, Lanoka Harbor, Ocean County, New Jersey.

Significance: Lanoka Harbor and Murray Grove were established in the mid-eighteenth century and are representative of the typical bay town, often referred to as the "Barnegat Bay resorts." The villages fronting the bay were established communities relying on the products of forest trade and sea long before the railroad brought resort trade. Lanoka Harbor and Murray Grove were supported by a substantial oyster industry. Murray Grove is further renowned as the "birthplace of Universalism America," where the first Universalist sermon in the United States was preached. The Unitarian influence remained in the community, with the establishment of the Murray Grove Universalist and Unitarian Retreat and Conference Center in the early 1800s.

History: Early twentieth century tourist guides discussed the two small towns of Lanoka and Murray Grove, located along Route 9, as a single entity. Today, strip development has further confused the boundaries between the settlements, previously known as Cedar Creek and Good Luck. In the early 1900s the Central Railroad of New Jersey's Travelers' and Tourists' Guide emphasized the quality of the Creek's water and fish, declaring that the village itself was "a mere settlement of baymen, who earn a livelihood during the Summer sailing yachts from Seaside Park to Barnegat Pier."<sup>1</sup> Leaving the Harbor for Forked River, the train tour guide mentions passing "the little flag station called Murray Grove."<sup>2</sup>

Not even a stop on the Central Railroad's run, Murray Grove is a worthy destination as the "birthplace of Universalism in America" and the home of the historic Potter church. In 1760, Thomas Potter built a non-denominational meeting house for the use of traveling preachers. According to the story, Potter was waiting for God to send a minister. One September day in 1770 a boat bearing the Rev. John Murray ran aground near Cranberry Inlet. Potter was cleaning fish near his home when the English Universalist minister approached him asking for food. The next Sunday, Murray delivered the first Universalist sermon in America. The meeting house was a Universalist church until 1809, when it was sold to the local Methodist Episcopal church for \$125.00.<sup>3</sup> Though covered in metal siding, the building still stands on its original site adjacent the Stafford Township cemetery, with an engraved stone marker outside the cemetery commemorating the meeting of Potter and Murray.

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<sup>1</sup> Central Railroad of New Jersey Travelers' and Tourists' Guide (New York: The Republic Press, 1910), 175.

<sup>2</sup> Central Railroad, 175.

<sup>3</sup> Harold Wilson, The Jersey Shore three vols. (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Co., 1953), 122-126.

Murray's contribution to the village lives on in more than name; the Murray Grove Universalist and Unitarian Retreat and Conference Center, established in the early 1800s, encompasses over 260 acres. The property includes a former stagecoach stop, the Ballou house, constructed in 1790.<sup>4</sup> Emphasizing the historical significance of the area, a 1914 pamphlet advertising the "institute" also described the excellent opportunities to fish, crab, and visit the state game farm in nearby Forked River.<sup>5</sup>

Surveying Cedar Creek in 1878, Woolman and Rose commented on the "extensive natural oyster-beds, which give employment to the shore people of this township, and are a source of considerable income to them."<sup>6</sup> Though the village has grown from the twenty-five to thirty dwellings and single hotel of those days, the bay is still the focus of both communities. The area is basically a suburban development, with modular homes crowded together for space along the inlets and larger two-story residences between Laurel Blvd. and the creek.

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HABS Historian  
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- Sources:
- Central Railroad Of New Jersey. Travellers and Tourists Guide to the Seashore, Lakes, and Mountains. New York: Republic Press, ca. 1898.
- Cohen, Lee. "Three Small Towns That Differ In Very Big Ways." Asbury Park Press, 9 July 1978, G2.
- "Murray Grove, The Birthplace of Universalism in America." (brochure) Murray Grove Association, 1914.
- Wilson, Harold. The Jersey Shore. three vols. New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Co., 1953.
- Woolman, H.C. and T.F. Rose. Historical and Biographical Atlas of the New Jersey Coast. Philadelphia: Woolman and Rose, 1878; reprint, Toms River, N.J.: Ocean County Historical Society, 1985.

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<sup>4</sup> Lee Cohen, Asbury Park Press (October 29, 1989.)

<sup>5</sup> "Murray Grove, The Birthplace of Universalism in America" (Murray Grove Association, 1914), 2.

<sup>6</sup> H.C. Woolman and T.F. Rose, Historical and Biographical Atlas of the New Jersey Coast (Philadelphia: Woolman and Rose, 1878; reprint, Toms River, N.J.: Ocean County Historical Society, 1985), 36.

Project Information:

This project was sponsored by the New Jersey Coastal Heritage Trail (NJCHT) of the National Park Service, Janet Wolf, director. The documentation was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS), Robert Kapsch, chief, under the direction of HABS historian Sara Amy Leach, project supervisor. Three historians completed the research during summer 1991: Field supervisor Sarah Allaback (Massachusetts Institute of Technology), Alfred Holden (University of Vermont), and Camille Gatz (North Carolina). David Ames (University of Delaware) made the large-format photographs. Historian, Elizabeth Harris May (George Washington University), edited the HABS reports.